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ABSTRACT

The essence of interpersonal communication in negotiation is the achievement of consensus. This paper discusses the many variables which affect negotiation situations, in small groups or in large institutions like the university. Specifically, will proper orientation in the bargaining process increase the chances of reaching consensus? What importance is a difference in status between negotiation participants? Contract grading, a process in which the instructor of a course negotiates with the student to determine his grade, is put forward both as the paradigm of an experiment into negotiation theory and as a practical possibility in university courses. Such contract grading would place competency demands on the teacher as the organization's arbitrator and would increase the validity of generalizing from data obtained in small discussion groups to individuals caught in the formalized status hierarchy of a large organization. Methods for controlling bargaining are discussed with reference to the logistics of the proposed study. (RB)

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CONTRACT GRADING IN THE BASIC COMMUNICATION COURSE: A NEGOTIATION AND BARGAINING SITUATION FOR COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

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by

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CONTRACT GRADING IN THE BASIC COMMUNICATION COURSE:
A NEGOTIATION AND BARGAINING SITUATION FOR COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

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Communication and education are isomorphic entities. Behavioral measurement of a student's educational achievement will be possible when physiological attitude instruments are refined via communication research. Until then, the educator should bargain with each student until consensus on a subjectively-determined criteria has been reached. Such grading procedure would serve to place competency demands on the teacher as organizational arbitrator and communication consultant. Subsequently, research in organizational communication would be facilitated. This report suggests the function and value of negotiation grading teams in assessing the validity of generalizing from data obtained in small, task-oriented discussion groups to individuals caught in a formalized role-structure and status hierarchy of a large organization. Finally, methods for controlling bargaining situations are discussed with reference to the logistics on a proposed study dealing with effects of orientation behavior on the probability of reaching consensus on educational goals in a negotiation and bargaining situation.

CONTRACT GRADING IN THE BASIC COMMUNICATION COURSE: A NEGOTIATION AND BARGAINING SITUATION FOR COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

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Behavioral scientists concerned with communication in educational organizations could derive a perceptive view of variables operant in a negotiation and bargaining situation by controlling contract grading alternatives. Subsequent verbal behavior could be measured by self-report instruments, while video-tape recorders simultaneously record patterns of non-verbal language. It is the purpose of this report to suggest appropriate control factors for empirical measurement in such negotiation and bargaining operations within the school system. Hopefully, the feasibility granted by such procedures will encourage research on learning criteria. Furthermore, research on contract grading can potentially broaden our knowledge of influence factors added to small group discussion situations when status positions are perceived by receivers in a formalized role-structure.

Although small group studies are often conducted on the rationale that decisions of organizational policy are made in group conference, it is fair to criticize the field of organizational communication theory for relying too heavily on vast generalizations from data obtained in small, task-oriented discussion groups. Generally speaking, negotiation groups differ from policy-making, task-oriented groups in that "whereas the latter pool ideas and abilities to obtain a solution or perform a task, the former attempt to ameliorate conflicting values or interests to get a solution (Campbell, 1960; McGrath & Julian, 1962, 1963)." However, achieving consensus is the essential purpose of interpersonal communication in a successful negotiation situation. The methodology of communicating toward that end is the concern of this author. For example, Gerald W. Phillips in his book Communication and the Small Group maintains that: "Consensus refers to the distinguishing feature of the small group, any group of two or more people who, for a given period of time, are concerned with a mutual goal and who devote their efforts during that time to the achievement of that goal (Phillips, 1963, pp. 7)." Similar to consensus, McGrath and Julian (1962) define the successful negotiation situation as a resolution of conflicting interests. Negotiation and bargaining may occur in the small discussion group setting during the process of resolving needs of a socio-emotional nature or task-related disagreements.

However, it seems reasonable that the context of an organization supplements the interaction effects between communication variables during negotiation, since the formalized structure imposes complicating status and role relationships. Although cooperation is related to both situations, the characterizing feature of a negotiation situation is that both communication participants "perceive each other to have conflicting preferences or opposed interests with regard to the different agreements that might be reached (Deutsch & Krauss, pp. 181)." Data should be collected in an attempt to determine empirically if variables related to a negotiation and bargaining situation in a university will significantly differ from a small, task-orientated discussion setting. The specific study suggested in this paper is addressed to the question: Does behavior providing orientation in a negotiation and bargaining process increase the probability of achieving consensus? Thus, results of this experiment can be compared to results obtained in 1970 by Knutson who asked essentially the same question within a group discussion, policy-making setting. Furthermore, since the status hierarchy

and/or role relationships imposed by organizational institutions can complicate the participant relations between negotiating parties, another question is relevant to the suggested research: Does it make a significant difference if the behavior providing high orientation is overtly performed by the high-status participant instead of by the low-status participant, and vice versa? A review of related literature can suggest appropriate control factors to employ in capturing the process of contract grading for similar behavioral studies.

Research Related to Negotiation and Bargaining

Although investigation into all phases of the negotiation and bargaining process is beyond the scope of this project, it is relevant to discuss several variables which frequently interact in the procedural assent to consensus in the negotiation situation. The most important variables in this area that have been determined are threat, representational role obligations, mediators, and dogmatism. Many other variables are present, but most of them (i.e., sex, size of the negotiation groups, etc.) have not constituted a significant factor in accounting for the variance between bargaining groups. Actually, other than laboratory simulations involving complex games, research on negotiation has not validified many variables as predictors of negotiation success. Thus, this survey will reference variables integrated in a negotiation situation which must come under control in measurement of contract grading.

Three sources do indicate that overt behavior may be correlated significantly with negotiation consensus (or success, if both parties feel satisfied with the outcome of the bargaining session). First, Guetzkow and Gyr (1954) found successful negotiation groups were highly correlated with a "generally pleasant atmosphere. . .understandable, orderly, and focused on one issue at a time (Guetzkow and Gyr, 1954, pp. 381)." Landsberger (1955) found a significant correlation between the occurrence of the postulated phase sequence developed by Bales and Strodtback (1955) and successful negotiation. Also, the level of hostility during initial phases was negatively correlated with the level of disagreement in the final phases. Positive social-emotional behavior in the final negotiation phase was positively correlated with consensus decisions. One can relate the communication of such hostility vs. positive socio-emotional behavior with the concept of orientation as it is discussed by Knutson (1970). Finally, McGrath and Julian (1963) concluded that successful negotiation groups had fewer "negative-affect messages and fewer negative feedback acts than less successful negotiation groups. They also had more neutral and total messages, more positive, neutral, and total feedback acts, and fewer attempted interruptions (Vidmar & McGrath, 1965, pp. 38-39)." Perhaps more attention to the negotiator interaction with regards to types of input can facilitate consensus in organizations.

Variables interacting with the bargaining situation have been extensively investigated through the use of laboratory games. For example, the effect of threat upon interpersonal bargaining was the topic of study conducted by Deutsch and Krauss (1962). Results indicated that only in the No Threat condition did individuals make an overall profit, based on rewards created by the experimenters. The implication is not clear for future negotiation prediction of success. But the study does indicate that the degree of threat imposed on individual negotiators must be controlled in the subsequent studies.

A similar study was conducted by Gallo (1966). Employing a trucking game, the investigators were interested in the effect of increased incentives in interpersonal bargaining. But the results indicating that the presence of

a large body of play money had significant effects in attaining consensus is explained in part by speculation that the "large incentives produced a number of cooperative gestures on the part of the subjects and that these gestures were then reciprocated. Support for this position can be adduced from the data gathered on style of play (Gallo, 1966, pp. 277)." In 1954-55 James L. Loomis wrote a doctoral dissertation in which cooperative relationships were investigated as trusting phenomena. The by-product of Loomis's research was the finding that "subjects who communicated were more likely to perceive trust than non-communicating subjects, and the probability increased as the level of communication increased (Loomis, 1959, pp. 314-315)."

Another variable operant in a negotiation situation is the presence or absence of the mediator and representational roles. Vidmar (1971) studied empirically the effects of manipulating both of these variables on negotiation effectiveness. His conclusions: "representational role obligations were generally detrimental to negotiation performance. Mediators tended to improve the performance of groups with role obligations, especially with regards to the effects of mediators in groups without role obligations (Vidmar, 1971, pp. 57)." These factors, like that of trusting based on incentives, must be controlled for measurement during the process of contract grading. Future research may be able to determine if differences arise when mediators are utilized in this format.

Finally, Druckman (1967) provides empirical support for eliminating the representational roles for experimental control and simplicity. In research on variables in a dyadic bargaining situation, Druckman found that "whether bargainers represented groups or themselves did not have a significant effect on compromise behavior (Druckman, 1967, pp. 279)." His experiment revealed a modified Dogmatism Scale to be significantly predictive of conflict resolution.

In addition, Joseph and Willis (1963) indicate variables which must be controlled in the environment during investigation of a two-party bargaining situation. Empirical investigation of negotiation for grades should incorporate the following control factors into the design of the study:

1. The availability of a central solution (structural prominence).
2. Information concerning the position of agreement reached by other subjects in an identical experiment (induced prominence).
3. The relative values of possible positions of agreement (linearity of reward structure).
4. The pattern of communicating offers (commitment).
5. The sex of subjects (Joseph & Willis, 1963, pp. 119).

The preceeding review of literature concerned with consensus in negotiation and bargaining situations reveals that very little is known and empirically verified about the process by which negotiation participants reach consensus. Subsequently, it has not been possible to develop strong predicting indices for successful negotiation in an organizational setting. However, controls over some negotiation variables can logistically lessen sources of variance that confound measurement of the contract grading process.

An example of appropriate controls adapted to a teacher-student bargaining situation is provided by the following description of an experiment planned according to criteria set for the basic speech communication course at Illinois State University. Contract grading provides the negotiation experience necessary to control the bargaining process by limiting the nature and scope of communication during the consultation sessions. The procedures are proposed for

investigating the effects of orientation behavior from a high-status individual on achieving consensus on educational goals in a negotiation and bargaining situation, although the relevance of such design to the statistical testing of other small group variables is evident.

Experimental Procedures

Selection of Subjects. Subjects for this study would be drawn from the basic course in Speech Communication. During the first class meeting of the semester a cooperative instructor who taught at least five sections of the basic course should distribute the Preliminary Research Questionaires to the students. A sample Questionaire is explicated in Appendix A of this report. All questionaires should be discarded except those indicating a preference for option five of Appendix A: negotiation with small group instructor to determine the student's course grade on the basis of the number and quality of performances on examinations and behavioral criteria. Thirty (30) males and thirty (30) females should be randomly selected from those indicating interest in option five from the classes of that instructor. In order to minimize the effects of different orientating individuals on achievement of consensus, one instructor should conduct all negotiation sessions. This is a wise policy for all experiments wherein nonverbal elements may interfere with the measurement of the dependent variable.

When the Preliminary Research Questionaire is administered to the students, they should be informed: "You are in an experimental section of Speech Communication; your course grade will be generated according to your response on this questionaire." However, after all experimental procedures have been executed, the subjects may be advised that the questionaire promise was necessary to assure realistic responses from them in the negotiation sessions. Subsequently, the course credit for subjects could actually be generated in the usual manner for the basic course, unless special permission from the course director is obtained to institute the decisions of the negotiation teams. This author thinks instituting the decisions a wise policy.

Training of Confederate. In all cases, the orienting individual should be the instructor, functioning as confederate. Prior to participating in the negotiation sessions, the confederate should be trained in the negotiation format, the meaning of statements of orientation, and the ability to recognize situations wherein statements of orientation would be appropriate. The instructor should be given a copy of the mean ratings given to specific statements according to subjects' perceptions of their orienting tendencies (Knutson, 1970, pp. 94-97). The effectiveness of the training should be estimated in the same manner established by Knutson (1970, pp. 44): "Independently determined by an analysis of the subjects' perceptions of the confederates' manipulation of their orientation behavior."

Experimental setting. Prior to several days during which the instructor participates in negotiation sessions, the investigator should contact the selected subjects and establish a time period of at least forty-five (45) minutes to be reserved for each bargaining meeting. The negotiation teams should meet in the instructor's office, and the instructor should be advised to wear the same clothing and retain the same arrangement of furniture in the office during the experimental week, in order that nonverbal message elements could be somewhat controlled. The experimenter could stand in the hall, outside the instructor's office until the subject arrived for the session. The subject should then be seated in a chair stationed near the teacher's desk. As the instructor remains seated at his desk, the perception of the instructor as a higher-status figure than is the subject within the organization of a

university should be maintained.

The experimenter should begin tape-recording the session prior to leaving the office for thirty minutes. The instructor must explain the alternatives available to the subject and answer any questions regarding the nature of this negotiation session before the bargaining prodedure begins. During the bargaining session, the instructor should not reveal that monetary incentives are offered him for high rank-scores on the Distance from Consensus Questionaire (Appendix B). The structural format of the negotiation sessions is explained in Appendix B. This instrument controls the number of positions of agreement available to the negotiation teams. The alternatives for each issue are listed, in rank-order according to the presumed preference of student and teacher. For example, it is assummed that the student in the required general education course would prefer to be given the highest grade for the least amount of work required. On the other hand, to simulate pressure from administrative sources, the instructor is given monetary incentive for providing as many learning experiences as he can and yet recording grades which are equitable to other students in the basic course (who must fulfill virtually all highly-ranked alternatives in order to earn a high class grade under the present course structure). The instructor is paid for his time, according to the following scale: 25 cents if the subject receives a rank score of 13-14, 20 cents if the subject receives a rank score of 11-12, 15 cents if the subject receives a rank score of 9-10, and 10 cents if the subject receives a rank score of 7-8. The instructor receives no pay for a rank score of less than seven points. Thus, a perfect score for a subject would be four, whereas a perfect score for the instructor would be fourteen. Although the success of individuals in achieving their desired rewards during the sessions could be estimated by a simple summation of rank scores from the plan of evaluation determined for each student, this instrument functions to measure distance from consensus at the termination of thirty-minute negotiation meetings

Another control which should be taken is the tape-recording of each session to prevent the instructor from deviating intentionally for purposes of monetary gain from the role he is to perform as confederate during the sessions. During the thirty minutes allowed for each bargaining session, the instructor must continue to manipulate the orientation variable only until consensus is reached. The instructor is required to secure the subject's signature on the contract as completed (Appendix B) before the rank-scores are counted toward the instructor's payroll. In cases where consensus is not overtly recognized after thirty minutes, both the instructor and the subject independently record a settlement compromise on the Appendix B form, indicating alternatives they believed to be acceptable to both parties.

At the termination of each thirty-minute session, the experimenter should enter the office and turn off the tape recorder. The student can then be informed: "Since this is an experimental section of Speech Communication, we would like your sincere evaluation of what transpired during the past thirty minutes. Your answers will be kept in confidence, and your instructor will in no way be penalized due to your evaluation of the session. However, the results could have implications for future grading policy."

The experimenter should provide the subject with the questionaire presented in Appendix C. The variables rated are: Interest, Orientation, Opinionatedness, Amount of Information, and the four factors of source credibility utilized by Knutson (1970). However, ratings on all variables except that of orientation can be discarded, having functioned as camouflage for the experimental variable.

When the subject completes the questionaire, the investigator should thank the participant and request that he not discuss this session with anyone during the next week, since his impressions of the session may influence the participation of other students in the experiment.

Summary of Control Provisions. The experimental design of the proposed research attempts to modify only minimally the procedures employed in the Knutson research from small discussion groups. Of course, adaptations to the two-person bargaining situation are essential in order to control the following factors, as justified by prior review of related literature:

1. The availability of a central solution (structural prominence). The structural variable is controlled by providing the number of positions of agreement available tc the subjects (Appendix B).
2. Information concerning the position of agreement reached by other subjects in a comparable situation (induced prominence). This information takes the form of the conditions under which non-experimental sections of the basic speech communication course are graded for the semester. The function of this point of procedure is twofold. First, the instructor is provided with a justifiable excuse to explain his preference for high-ranked items on the structural survey form (Appendix B); secondly, chances for compromise on the part of the subject are increased by induced prominence, a relationship established by Joseph and Willis (1963).
3. The relative values of possible positions of agreement (linearity of reward structure). For experimental purposes, it is assummed that all behavioral exercises and preparation for objective, fact-recall examinations are of similar worth as learning experiences. This approach was reflected in the scoring ranks assigned to each alternative issue in Appendix B.
4. The pattern of communicating offers (commitment). The ability to verbally communicate a position on one of the four issues in Appendix B in such manner that no retreat is possible was controlled in the designed study. Since in general, more agreements are reached when one of the subjects is able to commit himself to a position than when sufficiently restricted from commitment (Joseph & Willis, 1963), each subject should be informed that at any point during the session, he could offer alternative combinations without alienating the instructor.
5. The sex of subjects. Sex can be controlled by selection of an equal number of male and female subjects.

This report has offered an experimental procedure appropriate for a negotiating and bargaining situation within the organization of a university and control procedures applicable for subsequent research. Simultaneously, the structure of this study allows the experimenter to employ measuring instruments and operational definitions of variables in close parallel to those from the Knutson (1970) research in orientation behavior as it affects levels of consensus in group discussion on questions of policy. Thus, results from this and subsequent studies will document the validity of generalizing from small discussion group formats within a university to the negotiation and bargaining situations in the same type of organizations. In addition, it is hoped that educators will use the suggested controls during contract grading situations in the basic communication course, so that measurement of the value and success of those experiences will be possible.

APPENDIX A

Alternative Policies for the Issue: What should be the University's Policy concerning a Grading System for Speech Communication 110?

SOLUTIONS: Please indicate the policy you prefer for this semester. If you are enrolled on a pass/fail basis for this class, your response must be option number two (2). You are in no way guaranteed you preference, although you may be granted the option chosen by you.

1. Under the present policy, students are generally graded on an A to F scale, based on the position on a normal curve of the combined score of the Midterm Examination and the Final Examination (counting one-half of the course grade) plus a subjective grade from the small section instructor as determined by behavioral exercise criteria (counting one-half of the course grade).

2. Also under the present policy, all students enrolled except first semester freshmen may elect a pass-fail option with regards to the effect of the A to F evaluation on your grade transcripts and calculated grade point average.

3. Instead of option one or two, I wish to have my grade determined on an A to F scale, based only on my performance on the Midterm and Final Examinations. Although I understand that I must pass the small section in order to receive a grade.

4. Instead of the above options, I wish to have my grade determined on an A to F scale, based only on my performance in the small section, although I understand that I must pass both the Midterm and Final Examinations in order to receive a course grade.

5. Instead of any of the above alternatives, I wish to negotiate with my small group instructor to determine the number and quality of performance on the Midterm and Final Examinations and on Behavioral criteria for small section scores in order to receive the grade I desire from Speech Communication 110.

OPTION SELECTED _____

NAME _____ SECTION INSTRUCTOR _____

SECTION NUMBER _____ ADDRESS _____ PHONE _____

Please indicate your schedule of classes and co-curricular activities below:

APPENDIX B

NAME OF STUDENT _____

The following positions of agreement are available to you for negotiation. Each issue consists of several alternatives, none of which is beyond the requirements placed upon other Speech Communication 110 students. After you have carefully studied the alternatives, begin the negotiation session by offering a combination of alternatives which in your desired opinion justifies whatever grade you elect. You may offer alternative combinations anytime during the thirty-minute session. It is expected that you wish to act for the highest grade you can attain with the least commitment to fulfill course requirements. Your objective during this negotiation session is to satisfy your scholastic desires while retaining equity in the grading system for all Speech Communication 110 students. If you have any questions regarding the format of negotiation and bargaining, please ask the investigator or your instructor before beginning your session.

1. I desire the grade of: (circle one) A B C D

2. I prefer to:
   1. Receive credit for submitting or participating in every behavioral exercise I complete.
   2. Continue to revise or repeat every behavioral exercise until I reach the specific level of competence on that criteria as indicated to me prior to participating in the exercise.

3. The number of Examinations I will take:
   1. none.
   2. Final Examination only.
   3. Midterm and Final Examination.

4. I wish to be graded on the examinations on a scale ranging from A to D, and will repeat each elected examination until I attain an examination grade of:
   1. D (passing)
   2. C
   3. B
   4. A

5. I will participate in the following number of behavioral exercises:
   1. one per every five weeks of the semester.
   2. one per every four weeks of the semester.
   3. one per every three weeks of the semester.
   4. one per every two weeks of the semester.
   5. one per every week of the semester.

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT: _____

APPENDIX C

EVALUATION OF NEGOTIATION SESSION:

Please rate each variable explained below on a scale from 7 to 1. If you think a particular variable was strongly characteristic of your experience in the past thirty (30) minutes, give it a rating of 7. If you think the opposite was true of this bargaining session, as is described from this variable, mark a rating of 1. Use the values 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 to indicate degrees of effectiveness other than those specified above.

_____1. INTEREST. Statements are said to reflect the interest of their maker if they contain some indication of concern or involvement with the issue.

_____2. ORIENTATION. Statements are said to give orientation if they reflect an attempt on the part of the maker to resolve conflict, facilitate achievement of a group's goal, make helpful suggestions, or lessen tension.

_____3. OPINIONATEDNESS. A statement is said to be opinionated if it expresses a feeling, belief, or opinion, the factual basis for which is not apparent in the statement itself.

_____4. AMOUNT OF INFORMATION. A statement is said to be informative when it contains facts, statistics, and opinions of qualified sources which bear directly on some aspect of the question being discussed.

_____5. TRUSTWORTHINESS OF INSTRUCTOR. A trustworthy person would be just, correct, and honest.

_____6. COMPETENCE OF INSTRUCTOR. An individual is said to be highly competent if he is experienced and has a professional manner.

_____7. DYNAMISM OF INSTRUCTOR. An individual is said to be highly dynamic if he is energetic, alert, and active.

_____8. OBJECTIVITY OF INSTRUCTOR. An individual is said to be highly objective if he is open-minded, unbiased, and willing to consider other points of view.

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